**Urban Nun**

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**Synopsis:**

An Urban Nun has been invited to a rural retreat of her sisters. Somewhat against her better judgement she goes – and quickly discovers some moments of magic in being reunited with her peers. But factionalism rears its ugly head, and tensions rise – culminating with the arrival of a (male) Cardinal.

**Character:**

The Urban Nun is probably middle-aged, but otherwise can be any nun, anywhere.

**Production history:**

Urban Nun has been produced all over North America, both as a stand alone piece and as part of a longer play, Into.

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*NUN is alone on stage. Holds a mike or is at a stand-up one, as at a comedy club. Gradually she leaves this conceit behind, as she gets into her story and the “magic” elements of sound begin.*

URBAN NUN: I’m an urban nun.

I take my God with smoke.

I like him loud;

Howling drunk,

Crazy with despair,

A thorn in the side,

A kick in the gut.

Don’t want him leafy:

Gold leafy, green leafy, palm leafy.

Don’t want him pastoral;

Pastoral is death.

And yeah, yeah, death’s a comfort

But comfort is false.

*(A letter appears magically. Maybe out of her sleeve.)*

So this comes:

An invitation.

To an up-north, get-down Nunfest.

A Retreat for all the remaindered nuns of the world.

The valiant last two hundred.

All of us called

To a fine and quiet place

Of birds and bugs.

And birds.

And bugs.

And bugs.

So many, many bugs.

*(Long, disgusted sigh.)*

Nuns alfresco.

*(Reading.)* “In God’s own perfect nature.”

I think not.

If nature’s so perfect, God won’t be there.

What’s for him to do?

Lie under a tree and daydream some new plagues?

*(Remembers letter. Shrugs.)*

But I go.

If only to remember what my sisters look like.

Hey – even nuns get nostalgic!

I often dig out my convent yearbook

And imagine proms that never were,

Football games never cheered,

Novices who slipped

On the trip up God’s altar.

And I’ll curse the sisters who never visit me

Because of the trough of incorrectness

In which I wallow.

*(Sound under grows. Magical. Nature.)*

We retreat by bus and car,

Minivan, multivan, mountain bike.

Some hobble up the northern concessions –

Barefoot Nuns of Perpetual Atonement –

Grateful for the gravel,

The sharper the better.

And arriving by floatplane?

You guessed it – the Yankee Techno Nuns.

We’re met by Sister Katherine.

Kate the Innocent.

My convent bunkmate way back when.

A vestal goofball sap

With a saran wrap smile.

Kate welcomes us to the lodge,

Her arms upraised like a Rio statue.

Naturally, there’s an orientation cocktail party.

And yes, the jokes are just what you’d expect

From a giggle of Godbrides:

Requests for Virgin Marys.

Purple Jesuses.

Rusty Nails.

But funny thing: the walls of isolation

Begin tumbling like Jericho.

We’re so diverse, this last two hundred.

We’re so international. Intercultural.

Yet interlinked, by this umbilical wince of faith.

A tender bond, fortified with booze.

So: when Sister Kate gets out her singing nun guitar?

And warbles “Kumbayeh”?

Like a Kate Bush with hymen?

Hey - show some respect!

A musical cliché chased with Scotch

Can cure any sister’s blues.

And: when Sister Kate suggests a little splish-splash?

Don’t you even think about laughing!

God’s tilted the world into darkness.

His moon is warming the lake.

His sand fleas are urging us off the beach.

So we strip!

And we run!

Carmelites, Ursulines, Josephines, Magdalenes!

Militants, Pacifists, Militant-Pacifists!

New Agers, Mainliners, Hardliners, One Liners!

*(Sounds of rising joy, splashing, happiness.)*

The chaste – and the chased!

The dogmatic, the pragmatic, the stigmatic!

The night is filled with the rustle of shedding habits!

Falling wimples muffling fleabeach!

Twittering like a hundred plucked ravens

We pound over naked sand!

An army of motoring legs and arms!

We immerse in the northern waters!

Two hundred throats – gasp!

Four hundred nipples – pop!

It’s a glory of dunking sisters!

It’s a nubile of nuntits!

Nuntits! Nunarms!

Dark, sacred nunbushes!

I float out on my back, past them all.

I look up at the moon and the stars –

Stars that might spell “God”

And I say, “Things don’t get much better than this.”

Exactly. They start getting worse.

A lesbian nun-caucus has formed on the raft.

How do I know it’s a lesbian nun-caucus?

They’re debating the theology of Anne Murray.

“Who exactly is Snowbird?”

I swim in and think about getting up, but they glare.

They don’t extend the helping hand.

They know I’m a straight celibate.

I ask, “Guys, guys! If you’re not doing it – then what does it matter who you’re not doing it with?”

On shore, squabbling is erupting over beached habits!

We’ve existed in such isolation

It never occurred to us to sew on labels.

And, in the dark,

The traditional black,

The healing white,

The post-modern blue,

Even the floatplane chinos of the Yankee Technos –

It all looks the same!

*(Some sound up, under, maybe buzzing.)*

We stand and argue,

And the local mosquitoes gorge

On our precious blood.

*(Moment of pause.)*

Next day, Kate the Innocent announces activities.

Morning is for: “Silence, light crafts, non-competitive prayer.”

Afternoon, however, is a feast of options:

Seminars run by every faction;

Exercises in self-affirmation –

If it’s your faction,   
Exclusion if it’s not.

The Yankees go up in their plane.

They’re shooting God.

For a reality show.

The advocates of a female God

Huddle over their Bibles, smiting pronouns.

The Atoners are rolling about a bed of poison ivy,

Pissing themselves with joy.

They swell. They itch.

Nearer to their God they scratch.

*(A magic gong.)*

Ah! That’ll be the dinner bell.

The Cardinal’s coming.

Cardinal A.

The Big Silk.

The Grand Old Fart!

That silken redundant whiff of ecclesiastical flatulence.

No one’s going in the dining hall!

There’s controversy on the lawn!

The Macro-Feminists are organizing a boycott.

They’re saying a male Cardinal shouldn’t address a Retreat of female Sisters.

Outside, His eminence is waiting for a friendly nod.

Kate the Innocent thinks fast!

“The Cardinal’s penis has been inactive since World War II!

Where lies the problem!”

A leading Macro glares back.

“The problem, sister, lies not with the Dormant Dangler.

The problem stems from what that mini-flesh is connected to:

One hundred and ninety pounds of suppressed testosterone.”

A compromise is proposed.  
By the Canadian nuns.  
The Cardinal is declared an Honorary Woman.

I’ve never actually seen Our Cardinal.

Our Cardinal lives in a great big mansion.

On a tiny perfect street.

I work - on a road with aching shoulders.

I work.

I WORK!

*(Struggling to stay under control.)*

The Cardinal lectures us on Obedience.

He wants us to obey.

Well excuse me, Mr. Cardinal:

What do you know that’s worth obeying!

How dare you tell me to obey!

I don’t have time to OBEY!

Someone – I don’t know who – throws a bun.

OK OK, I do know who.

T’was I.

All star pitcher, Triple A Convent League.

I rise to my feet.

*(Bun appears magically.)*

I grip the bun in my hand.

It burns my palm like hot salt.

I wind up.

OBEY THIS, YOU PIG!

*(Nun throws – perfect form. Oomph sound from Off.)*

Nailed him!

Square in the pre-War nuts!

He’s going serious grey.

The hall’s going dead silent.

Until: From every corner – applause. Cheers.

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And now! A cathartic storm of pumpernickel!

Flying snowballs made of hashbrowns!

Honeypots! Jampots!

And, from an ancient Carmelite who vaguely remembers a 1965 Tom Jones concert:

Her immaculate panties!

The Cardinal “obeys” the laws of bun-bardment.

He falls!

The Cardinal “obeys” the laws of gravity.

He hits the dining hall floor!

Hard!

*(Dead silence.)*

But his death?

Oh, that was from natural causes, no question.

Right?

We’re so diverse this last two hundred.

Yet our collective awe stills our voices.

But remember? I don’t like silence.

I’m an urban nun.

Silence is pastoral.

So I throw another bun.

At the Atoners.

Easy targets – they’re puffed up like zeppelins.

When they glare back

With hate in their itchy-pig eyes,

I blame the Carmelites, and duck.

A minute later the dining hall’s filled with missiles.

Everyone’s beaning everyone who does not share their exact monopoly on grievance.

Good!

To hell with this fiction of Nuns in Paradise.

I run out of there.

I howl at the moon until it begins to shake.

God’s shivering behind it.

He knows how far I can hurl my anger.

He sees that babel of bunning nuns.

He knows he could be next.

I’ve got to get out of here!

I’ve got to get back to the city!

I leave a note for my friend Kate.

‘Come to my neck of the woods!

Come weep for my people!’

I drive off.

*(Sound of rising traffic.)*

I leave my sisters behind.

They are not of my kind.

I hit the freeway.

Rush back to my city.

Hurtle along this vast, trackless highway.

A thousand miles an hour

Towards lights that dazzle.

That blind.

And I don’t understand this urge;

I don’t understand this race of faceless cars

Where no one knows anything

Anymore

About the others.

Where we only crave isolation

From each other.

*(She has returned to the comedy club mike.)*

And I have to ask, I have to ask this, I have to ask you

Who does all this serve?

Who’s really gaining?

Who’s really losing?

Why are we doing it?

Why are we doing this ourselves?

Does anyone know?

*Black.*

**The End.**